

FELIX & SPEAR

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Press Release
November 9, 2021

THE FACE: Portraits by Tam Joseph

19 Nov 2021 – 9 Jan 2022

Ealing, London W5, November 9, 2021 – Felix & Spear Gallery is delighted to present the exhibition *THE FACE: Portraits by Tam Joseph*. This is Joseph's second solo exhibition with the gallery.

Resemblance is key to a good portrait. The painter cannot move too far away from a likeness for fear of making the work into just another picture of a head. Artists who follow the map of fine art traditions that lead to a successful, even great portrait, will have their work marked by signs and measures that orient the viewer to monotonous style and presentation. But in the past century artistic imagination has deliberately ignored the signs, bent the rules, and found alternate routes to the goal of a good portrait.

Variations in style are so numerous that no two portraits are likely to be the same. The freedom to toss aside convention and make up the rules as a painting develops, often asks a lot of the viewer. Good portraiture reveals a balance of the components that elevate it from being just another study of someone's head to something more complex. Character, personality, and much more are things the artist tries to capture and convey. It often includes the nature and mood of the subject and a sense of history that renders it timeless. And the portraits of Tam Joseph have the addition of humour and wit. A good portrait can easily become a caricature if emphasis is given to the funny side. But none of these tilt that way. Their reading is heightened by little twists of subject, painting technology and cultural history.

Many of Tam's subjects are musicians and the manner he portrays them is as varied as their music. Capturing the slick, permed hair of Soul and R&B singers Percy Sledge, Little Richard, James Brown, Chuck Berry, Fats Domino et al says a lot about their desire to be different personalities making a different music. The great Charlie Parker's Halo glows like a neon beacon in the dark. The momentarily emerged face of the musically evasive Miles Davis from an ocean of blue, is both a snapshot and a history lesson about his origins in Jazz. And how close do you want to get to Grace Jones? "Until her sunglasses reveal your reflection" is the answer. But it's the 'Laughing Legend With Stratocaster' that engages all of Tam's painterly strategies. It's a Rock and Roll exposé of historical references that inter weaves Jimi Hendrix smile with that of Frans Hals' Cavallier. If in 1624 Hals believed clothing revealed the greatness of the man, Tam's portrait adds to it the ability to tell the time. By embedding cultural and historic symbols in his subject's decorated sleeve he recreates the extravagant and complex personality of the Rock and Roll era.

Gavin Jantjes, Oct 2021

About Tam Joseph

b.1947 Roseau, Dominica

Lives and works in London, England

Dominican-born British painter, sculptor and graphic designer Tam Joseph emigrated from the Caribbean to London in 1955 at the age of eight. He studied at the Central School of Art and Design London (1967), followed by a short period at the Slade School of Fine Art before leaving to travel in Europe and the Far East. Joseph subsequently graduated in Typographic Design from the London College of Printing. While working for the magazine Africa Journal in the late 1970s and early 1980s, he travelled extensively in Africa, commenting: 'I have never felt any tangible difference between me and the peoples of Africa south of the Sahara.' In the 1970s, Joseph worked with the Keskidee Centre Collective North London, a hub for African and Afro-Caribbean politics and arts. Joseph's practice often combines humour with serious political narratives to challenge contemporary realities and their inherent contradictions. Awareness, diaspora, identity, and World history remain recurrent themes. Selected exhibitions include Caribbean Art at the Crossroads, El Museo del Barrio, Studio Museum in Harlem and Queens Museum (2012), No Colour Bar: Black British Art in Action 1960-1990, Guildhall Art Gallery, London (2015-16), and Life Between Islands, Tate Britain (2021-22).

The works of Tam Joseph are in private and public collections including: The Arts Council; Victoria & Albert Museum; The Museum of London; Wolverhampton Art Gallery; Kelvingrove Gallery; Ben Uri Gallery; Contemporary Art Society; Sheffield City Art Gallery; Camden Libraries; Bradford City Museum; Newlyn Orion.

NOTES TO EDITORS

Gallery address: **Felix & Spear, 71 St. Mary's Road, London W5 5RG**

Exhibition Opening Hours: Wed – Fri 11.00 – 18.00, Sat - Sun 12.00 – 15.00

If you would like more information about this topic, please contact 020 8566 1574 / press@felixandspear.com

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